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ABSTRACT

The Schools Reaching Out (SRO) project attempts to demonstrate that urban public schools can fundamentally change their relationship with low-income parents and their communities, and in so doing, improve students' academic and social success. The project was designed to interweave research and practice in two laboratory schools in Boston (Massachusetts) and New York. The research focused on third-party interventions and school change. Essential research questions were: (1) What happens when a third party introduces a project like SRO into a school? and (2) How can a third party best facilitate the development of processes and programs for linking parents and schools? This paper discusses SRO and offers comparisons between the SRO program and programs at four other sites. The design of SRO is discussed. Discussion of issues relating to third-party intervention concerns the nature of project modes, real and perceived needs in schools, the role of the principal, relationships with other programs, and site selection. The study concludes that parent involvement in children's education is enhanced when third party intervention includes a body of literature or experiences that substantiates the project's ideas, a model for action, and directions for the model's implementation. Careful site selection is critical. Several additional conclusions are discussed. A total of 21 references are appended. (BC)

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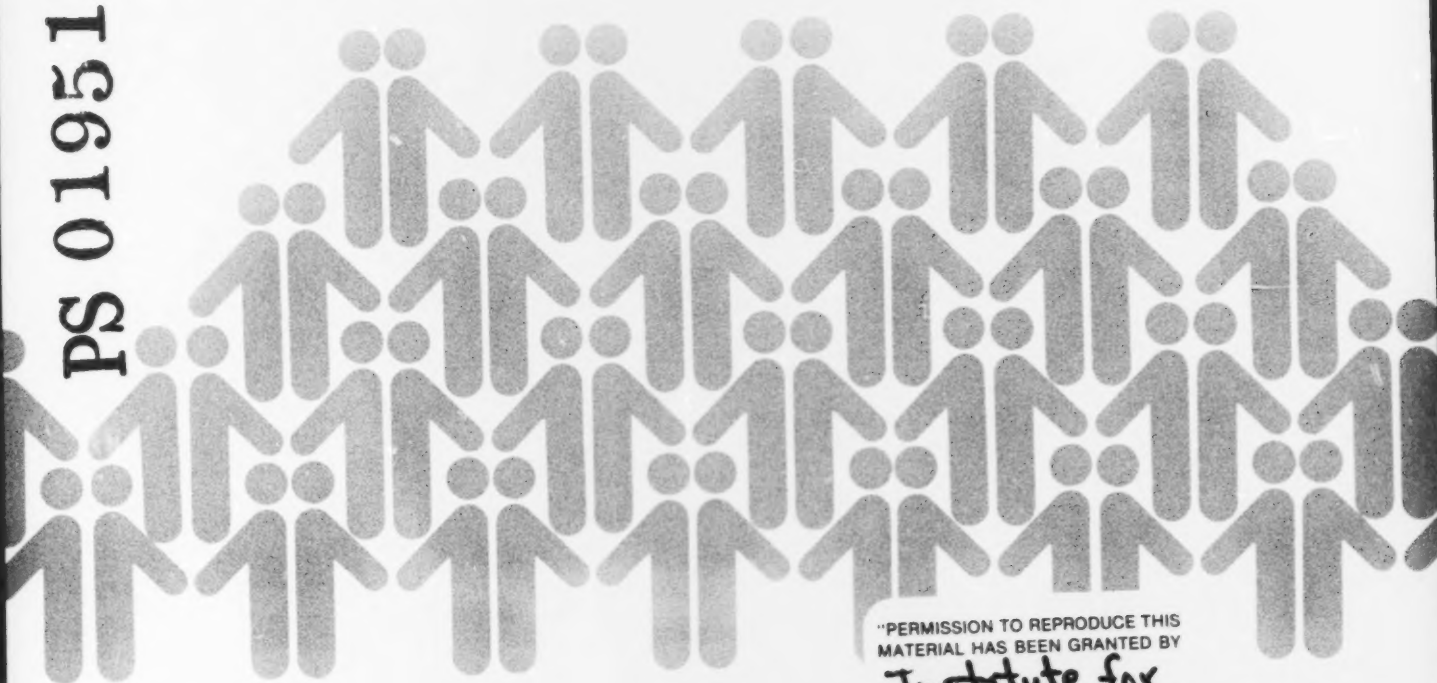
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August 1990

Schools Reaching Out is a project which attempts to demonstrate that urban public schools can fundamentally change their relationship with low-income parents and their communities, and in so doing, move closer to the goals of academic and social success for all children.

The project began in September 1988 as two schools -- the David A. Ellis School in Boston and P.S. 111, the Ochs School in New York City -- agreed to collaborate with the Institute for Responsive Education as "laboratory schools" trying out strategies to build new relationships with parents and the community.

Schools Reaching Out was designed to interweave research and practice. While the laboratory schools work, aided by IRE staff, to refine new strategies, a team of researchers is investigating questions of what works and why -- again, in collaboration with the schools' staff. This publication, and the series of which it is a part, is an effort to relate some of those learnings.

For more information on Schools Reaching Out or the series of publications, write to: Institute for Responsive Education, 605 Commonwealth Avenue, Boston, MA 02215.

Schools Reaching Out is funded by the Boston Globe Foundation, the Aaron Diamond Foundation, the J.M. Foundation, the Leon Lowenstein Foundation, and the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation.

There is a relatively new and growing body of research and literature addressing the relationship between parent involvement in schools and student success (Bronfenbrenner and Weiss, 1983; Cochran, 1988; Comer, 1986; Davies, 1988; Epstein, 1985; Friere, 1981), much of which makes the case that increased parent involvement enhances the likelihood of student success. This relationship has spawned numerous projects that attempt to involve parents in the schools. One such project is Schools Reaching Out (SRO), sponsored by the Institute for Responsive Education, a non-profit organization founded in 1973 and based in Boston.

Schools Reaching Out was designed to interweave research and practice. While two "laboratory" schools -- the David A. Ellis School in the Roxbury section of Boston and P.S. 111 the Ochs School on the West Side of Manhattan -- worked, aided by IRE staff, to try out strategies to build new relationships with parents and the community, a team of researchers investigated what worked and why. This research involved a seven-member team investigating five different questions:

* Success for All Children

What are the links between parent involvement, school-community collaboration and children's academic and social success? How do these links begin and how are they maintained?

* Teacher Roles and Development

How can teachers initiate and maintain connections with families and other community resources?

* The Community and the School

How can a school learn about the strengths and problems of the communities it serves? Can the process of producing a "community portrait" have a positive influence on school practices and programs? How can the needed data be gathered and communicated to the school?

* The Impact of Policy on School-Parent-Community Relations

What differences do policies of various kinds make for the aspects of school crucial to school-parent- community relations?

Our research focused on "third-party" interventions and school change. Our essential research questions were: What happens when a third-party like IRE introduces a project like SRO into a school? How can a third-party best facilitate the development of processes and programs to link parents and schools?

This paper will discuss the SRO project and our experiences and observations as action researchers in the two SRO laboratory schools. As part of our task, we also visited a number of schools nationwide -- as comparison sites -- to help us understand more about what was occurring in the SRO schools. This paper, therefore, will offer comparisons between the various programs we visited and the SRO schools, and will conclude with a set of recommendations about third-party interventions that aim at increasing parent involvement in schools. In making these visits to comparison sites, we made assurances that we were only interested in these programs as they shed

light on Schools Reaching Out or third-party interventions. For that reason, we told our informants, the programs would remain anonymous.

SRO: The Salient Issues

The SRO project intended to enhance the possibility of success for all students by forging new relationships among schools, families and communities. This goal is described in one of the requests for foundation support (1988):

Neither schools by themselves nor parents can break the link between poverty and school failure. Neither parents nor schools can do the job without the support of other community resources. (pg. 1)

Moreover, in offering the conceptual framework for the project (1988), IRE expressed its strong commitment to helping low-income parents become more involved in the education of their children:

It is hoped that major attention will be given to finding ways to involve and serve the parents who have the least positive contact with the school. To do this requires a variety of out-of-school and non-traditional outreach efforts. (pg. 1)

SRO's rationale addressed both the importance of developing new relationships among schools, parents and communities and the need to do so at this time. The current disconnectedness among the home, school and community is perceived as a problem that is serious, acute

and worsening. The funding proposal for the SRO project (1988) states:

...there is wider recognition now than in the 1970s and early 1980s of the seriousness of the problems posed by the existence of a two-tiered society, one affluent, generally well-educated and optimistic; the other poor, increasingly isolated, badly educated, and despairing. (pg. 3-4)

In developing the project's proposal, IRE took aim at some of the most complex, confounding and long-standing issues facing educators. The question of whether formal education can be a means of academic attainment and, ultimately, social mobility was raised nearly a quarter century ago by Coleman (1966) and later by Jencks (1972). The pessimism engendered by their two reports stirred a vigorous debate on the effects of schooling. Although most educational researchers and theorists lined up staunchly in support of the belief that schooling matters (Goodlad, 1984; Lortie, 1975; Kirst, 1983), one significant change had occurred: educators were forced to attend to the role of the home in the education of the child.

The SRO project was an attempt to bring together the major forces in the life of the child -- the school, the home and the community in which he/she lives -- to help the child succeed in school. At the core of the project are the beliefs that (1) all children can succeed, (2) academic and social success in school matters, (3) neither

the school alone nor the home alone can ensure the academic and social success of the child.

At the project's core is the assertion that schools, as presently structured, arbitrarily and artificially create winners and losers, either as a result of one's neighborhood or academic track. The children who lose in school are destined to remain in a self-perpetuating, negative loop of social failure throughout their lives.

The SRO project proposal states:

The worsening and destabilizing gap between the have's and the have not's is exacerbated by the inability of communities and schools to break the link between social and academic failure on the one hand and poverty and social status on the other.
(pg. 4)

At the root of the SRO project is a fundamental belief that schools, as institutions, lack the vision and the capacity to restructure themselves. The responsibility for forging new relationships, therefore, ultimately must fall to inspired third-party intervenors. In this case, IRE is the intervenor, and the SRO project the vehicle by which it attempts to bring change to the school. It should be noted that many types of third-parties have attempted to influence the operations of public schools -- academic institutions, consulting groups, non-profit organizations, and religious organizations to name but a few. Each has been a guest in the public school's home. The behavior of the intervenor, as well as the host's

reaction to them, have been as varied as the types of groups that have visited.

SRO: The Design

IRE created the SRO project as a demonstration, and received funding for two years: the 1988-89 and 1989-90 school years. The project's initial design called for several core programmatic components in the two participating school sites including (1) a family support program including home visitors and the development of parent support clusters in the neighborhood and the school, (2) a school-based parent drop-in center, (3) a school-based teacher development program, (4) buttressing at least one existing mechanism for parent involvement in school planning and decision-making -- such as a planning team, school improvement council, or parent advisory committee -- with emphasis on pulling in those parents least connected with the schools, (5) coordination and enhancement of social service and other community resources, (6) and teacher/specialist staffing so that school-based people might become liaisons to the home and the community as well as coaches for colleagues within their schools.

The design also identifies the principal as a key player with significant conceptual and operational duties. The

funding proposal (1988) states:

In each site, the principal will have administrative responsibility for the demonstration project, which will be considered part of the mainstream activity of the school -- not a separate "outside" project....His or her positive interest and support for the work of the demonstration is a requirement for the school to participate. (pg. 18)

Finally, IRE laid out several requirements for itself as the third-party intervenor. First, each site would be assigned a half-time project coordinator from IRE to provide on-site technical assistance, training for teacher/specialists and cross-site communication. Second, IRE would set up a one-day planning, orientation and team-building meeting before the opening of school. Third, at each site, IRE would organize 12-16 hours of start-up meetings for project staff, all participating teachers and administrators. Fourth, IRE would provide continuous on-site technical assistance and monitoring. Fifth, IRE would provide organization and facilitation of staff development and parent workshops. Sixth, IRE promised to handle initiation and facilitation of the site evaluation process. Seventh, IRE would install a process to facilitate the continuous exchange of information and materials between the two sites and itself. Eighth, IRE would be responsible for publicity, public relations and dissemination for the site work.

Third-Party Interventions: SRO and Four Comparison Sites

The SRO project's goals, in general, are similar to those of four other projects that we visited. All five projects aim at involving urban, politically disenfranchised parents of low socioeconomic status more directly in the education of their children in the belief that doing so will increase the likelihood of social and academic success for these children.

There exists a number of striking similarities and important differences between and among these five projects. In this section we will identify several important variables associated with third-party interventions, and examine how each of the projects is structured in relation to the variables.

The Project's Model. The research on third-party interventions is reasonably clear on several points. Despite the best-laid plans of project developers, some degree of mutual adaptation usually occurs (Greenwood, Mann and McLaughlin, 1975; Mann, 1976a). In other words, the project's orthodoxy/model is adapted to "fit" the school in which it is being implemented, and the school's culture (its standard operating procedures, practices, etc.) adapts itself to accommodate the new program. The more rigorous the intervenor's orthodoxy, the less likely

adaptation: the looser the model, the more likely adaptation (Mann, 1976a).

Our research, however, has led to the understanding that what is commonly called "the model" is, in fact, a tripartition, consisting of: (1) a set of ideas (or, an orthodoxy), (2) a model of action, and (3) a set of strategies for implementation (or, explicit directions for activating the model of action). The SRO project came to its two school sites with a well-developed set of principles and ideas. However, the ideas were supported neither by a model of how to translate those ideas into school-based practice nor specific directions about ways to activate the model. Instead, each of the two school sites was asked to put together its own model. The project director said:

The schools didn't think about a model, nor did the foundations. There is some orthodoxy. There is a mindset and some beliefs about the failure of socially marginal children. We [IRE] wanted to advocate that failing children are being failed by the system, and that they can learn with the combined resources of schools and communities.

In some ways, the situation in which the two schools found themselves can be likened to an individual who receives a large gift (in this case, significant foundation support) from a distant aunt, an impressively wrapped item requiring assembly, but discovers that the box contains many parts with no directions for putting the item

together. Thus, in both schools the principal and staff were presented with a good deal of well-meaning verbiage, but were given little direction in how to operationalize it.

Projects that involve the active participation of an outside party often encounter the mutual adaptation conundrum: "Are we guests in this home or have we been hired to redecorate it?" Depending upon their response, intervenors either actively engage their clients in change, or wait until they are asked for their opinions. The difference in approach can have a profound impact on the range of changes that occur. For example, in the Boston SRO site, there existed clear differences of opinion among the third-party intervenors regarding how assertive to be with the faculty and school principal. These differences led some of the intervenors to become quite frustrated by the pace and direction of the project at this site.

In one of the comparison projects, two participating schools chose to become involved with a radical new approach to working with students at risk, but were given few directions about how to activate it. In this case, the two principals disagree about the specificity of "the model" that accompanied the ideas provided by the intervenor. One principal feels that the model was

reasonably clear, while the other perceives that it required the school to translate the knowledge into workable practices.

Other school people we talked to who participated in another school intervention indicated that the ideas that drove their project were translated into a nine-step model. The clarity of the model was one of its strengths. However, one participant in the process expressed the belief that a clear model was insufficient without attention being paid to implementation:

The program is a nine-step model but there are no visual directions for the school. The principals get the nine steps, but no directions on how to do them.

Consequently, the program has been implemented with varying degrees of fidelity to the model in each of the schools in which it was applied. The coordinator is currently assembling a packet for school principals that contains, with greater specificity, what is expected by the intervenor. She commented that the intervenor "has been reluctant to put things into writing. Each school [should] develop its own model."

In a third intervention, we noted that the district had created a shared vision of parent involvement that was operationalized into a three-step action plan: (1) capacity building and preparation for school staff, (2)

partnership development, and (3) follow-up and support. Capacity building had to do with the willingness of staff members to understand the need for and welcome parent involvement. Partnership development referred to providing for parents an array of options for how they might involve themselves in the education of their children. Follow-up and support related to technical assistance and resource development. It should be noted that this vision was a product of collaboration between the intervenor and the district, not the intervenor's idea alone.

Intervenors have told us that their resistance to putting their thoughts about implementation in writing is a function of the research literature that seems to indicate the likelihood that these thoughts eventually will be adapted by the site. Intervenors have also told us that their interest in having sites develop their own models for action is based on a commitment to fostering local ownership of the projects. However, our research indicates that many intervenors focus overwhelmingly on the development of ideas and largely ignore implementation strategies, assuming that good ideas will generate action. This is akin to the "Stone Soup" parable, in which three hungry soldiers come to a town in search of food only to find that no one is willing to share. Undaunted, they place some stones in a pot of water and begin to make

"soup." Slowly, the curious villagers approach the soldiers and are told that a marvelous pot of stone soup is being made, and that they can share it if they would only contribute some vegetables. One by one, the villagers drop in carrots, potatoes, onions, celery and turnips. After a few hours, all involved -- including the three clever soldiers -- share this delicious soup. In the parable, the villagers, spurred by their curiosity, willingly drop their vegetables in the intervenors' pot. In schools, many an intervenor's pot remains empty.

Responding to a Felt Need. The literature on change consistently discusses the importance of recognizing and responding to a specified need as a key and early step in the change process (Kanter, 1983; Burke, 1982). Need recognition usually happens in one of two ways, problem solving or goal seeking. Through problem solving approaches, people on-site are helped by the intervenor to perceive their needs through a somewhat clinical approach to intervention (Lawrence and Lorsch, 1967). Through the goal seeking approach, people on site are asked to support movement toward the intervenor's goal(s) (Blake and Mouton, 1974; Likert, 1961).

Many third-party interventions are initiated by one key person in an organization, such as the school principal or the district superintendent, and address his or her notion

of what ails the school while not necessarily corresponding to the staff's more widely held views of what needs to be changed. Research holds that such interventions are less likely to be successful (Berman and McLaughlin, 1978; Fullan, 1982; Greenwood, Mann and McLaughlin, 1975). However, more recent research has emerged that indicates unilaterally initiated interventions can succeed if the teachers are institutionally supported in making the desired changes (Crandall, 1983; Miles, 1983).

The SRO project was initiated by IRE and responded to a set of educational and sociological needs felt acutely by that organization and its staff. In New York City, IRE sent a call for proposals to participate in the SRO project to a number of community school district superintendents, and selected a district whose superintendent has a history of seeking to involve parents in the education of their children. His district is currently the only one in New York City that has a full-time parent coordinator, a concrete manifestation of his commitment to parent involvement. In Boston, the IRE staff identified a zone superintendent in whose district they felt the project could succeed. Both superintendents, visionary but nonetheless divorced from the daily workings of the schools, then selected the SRO laboratory schools within their districts.

Our research suggests that neither of the selected schools held a strongly felt need for the sort of intervention promised by the SRO project. The belief that academic and social success for all children could be realized through active parent involvement was not strongly held in these schools. The need to learn ways to increase parent participation was not strongly felt. One teacher after a year in the New York City project explained the situation this way:

The weakest link of the project is involving parents. It's not a need here. We have very divided parent-teacher relationships in this school. They don't trust us.

Another teacher said:

The problem here isn't with parents, it's with the administrators. We've tried to tell them about some of the school's problems, but they're not interested in hearing us.

Although these two comments point toward the need for some sort of intervention, it became evident during our research that the staffs of the two schools had not been helped to identify their own needs, and had not bought into the needs identified by IRE. The project seems to have relied on the power and influence of the people directly involved as the most prominent players (the principals, the key teachers, the site facilitators, the parent leaders and, to a lesser degree, the district superintendents) to convince their colleagues that the

schools needed what the project offered. These people were largely unsuccessful.

Some of the other programs we visited had similar experiences and described the interventions in their schools as not responding to widely felt needs. One project director said:

I can't say whether it [the project] responded to a felt need. We had high achievement test scores after the first year, and that was a need, but I'm not sure if the teachers would say it was.

In one comparison site, the county superintendent initiated the program. The director said:

He decided, unilaterally I think, to bring it [here] when he was hired. He had read some of [the intervenor's] books and had heard him speak a few times. He sent me and others for three weeks.....to be trained by [the intervenor] and his staff.

One major difference between this intervention and the SRO project is that participants in this comparison project receive intensive training for a substantial period of time while SRO participants received little training.

As of the writing of this report, the comparison intervention was underway in 30 schools and some staff members from all of the schools have been trained by the intervenor and his staff. Yet, it should be noted that the participating schools did not self-select. They were chosen randomly, not on the basis of felt need or congruence with the intervenor's goals. "The selection

process runs counter to the bottom-up, ground-swell approach, which works best."

In another of the comparison sites, the school system's acceptance of the intervention project was facilitated by a long-standing relationship between the intervenor and the city's superintendent. A school-based participant reported that a city assistant superintendent who oversees the city's many elementary schools has a close working relationship with the one school in which the project was placed. Moreover, the match was enhanced by the school principal's desire to latch onto a project that would energize her staff. There was no application process.

In this school the only felt need considered was the principal's. Staff members who disagreed with the project's goals, or who resisted the project for other reasons, were actively encouraged by the principal to transfer to another school. The principal's felt need may have had more to do with the desire to revamp and energize her staff and less to do with the specific aims of the intervention.

Interestingly, when the intervenor attempted to begin the project in the school, the principal was immersed in a legal battle with the teachers' union over the firing of a teacher. Anyone involved with schools knows how

completely this type of difficulty permeates the climate of a school: an inauspicious time to begin anything new. Working in tandem with the principal, the intervenor was convinced to delay the project's onset for one year. This year, in the eyes of the principal, was spent laying the seeds of the project's success:

I cleaned house before this project. There was an 80% turnover in staff. I terminated some teachers and chose teachers carefully especially for this project....I had a hidden agenda. The faculty was not ready to listen to someone tell us what to do. We had to be brought to the point where we could start to work. We were in limbo. It took a whole semester to get going.

In another one of our comparison sites, the principal also admitted to creating an atmosphere for change through staff selection. School overcrowding enabled her to hire almost 20 new teachers who were far more sympathetic to her way of thinking than those who had been hired under previous administrations.

In two of the projects we visited, a significant external event -- a court-ordered desegregation plan -- facilitated parent involvement. In one instance, the school district took this as an opportunity to write parent involvement guidelines into the order, thereby institutionalizing involvement. As a consequence of this strategy, integration funding became available for parent involvement activities: school buses ran at night to transport parents to meetings and child care was made

available at meetings held in schools and local housing projects.

It should be noted that our research indicated that the likelihood of developing a meaningful parent involvement program within a school is greatly enhanced not only by administrator support but by also having a written parent involvement policy. Earlier research (Epstein, 1985; Henderson, 1987) has also documented the finding that successful parent involvement occurs where a policy is developed to formalize it.

It is difficult for many school-based people to understand the need for including communities as partners or, if the need is understood, to operationalize it. Most of the projects we researched claim to seek a partnership among schools, parents and communities. We found in the SRO project, as well as many of the other projects, that the community component of this tripartite relationship is often the weakest. Typically, teachers who have reached out to families have been stymied by the inaccessibility and unavailability of community services. As schools become more in touch with the needs of the entire family, social agencies -- already overburdened and underfunded -- are asked to do more. During interviews with teachers, we heard of several instances in which a teacher helped a family understand the need for social service

intervention, only to discover that the linkage to these agencies was not effective enough to deliver the needed service to the parents.

Finally, it is important to mention that not all needs must be felt before the onset of an intervention: some needs develop as a result of the intervention. For example, the SRO project, once underway, attempted to address the needs of teachers through a mini-grant program, offering small sums of money to further their goals for parent involvement in their classrooms. Some of the project's most creative successes emerged from this component: when given the opportunity to develop partnerships with parents on their own, many teachers seemed excited and willing to engage in the process. By comparison, one of the other projects we studied offered schools (meaning administrators) the opportunity to write mini-grants to develop schoolwide parent involvement projects. Although some interesting ideas have emerged from the applications, it is unclear to what extent the teachers have joined in the process. The decision to structure parent involvement programming around the ideas of district or school administrators alone does not engender the sort of teacher commitment needed to make change happen.

Selection of the Site. There are a number of factors

critical to the appropriate selection of sites for third-party interventions: the school's history/culture (Sarason, 1982); other, perhaps competing, programs and projects in the school; and the leadership/support of the principal.

Many IRE staff members acknowledge that the SRO project did not reach its desired outcomes. It was plagued by an assortment of problems in both sites, problems that might have been avoidable had more attention been paid to the site selection process.

Both SRO schools are inner-city schools with long records of low student achievement. Both schools have a veteran teaching staff. Both schools have been largely resistant to change. One teacher in the New York City school said:

With the past principal, we were secure. There wasn't a lot of pressure to do things differently. He [the previous principal] didn't encourage us to mix with parents.

Such resistance to change, even in the face of consistently low student achievement, often indicates a systemic problem that ought to concern intervenors seeking to test out a new approach.

One variable that appears to have an effect on the suitability of a site for intervention is the number of projects and programs already underway within the site.

Both SRO sites were laden with other programs and projects, each of which was meeting its own form of resistance in the schools. In the New York City school, for example, the principal had applied for and received a PIP (Parent Involvement Program) grant from the New York City Board of Education. Although the PIP and SRO projects have seemingly similar goals, operationally they work at cross purposes, competing for limited teacher time and energy. A teacher in the New York City school said:

PIP interferes [with SRO]. PIP wants things done for parents, not for teachers....SRO tries to increase achievement for all kids through parent involvement. PIP tries to increase parent involvement in the schools. If I have to do PIP again next year, I'm gone.

The IRE Site Facilitator in New York City said:

The aims of PIP and SRO are different, not similar.... In retrospect, the model was a mistake, and starting two new programs [PIP and SRO] at the same time complicated it terribly.

The circumstances confronting another of the interventions was slightly different. Many of the schools in this project also had a history of low student achievement. The district has responded to this problem by implementing a number of other programs throughout the years that occupy the time and energy of teachers. However, these programs and the intervention we studied appear to have been well integrated, and appear to be perceived as parts of the same whole by district staff members.

Moreover, these schools have embraced the Effective Schools Program, and are in the process of implementing site-based management. Despite what other interventions may have considered "distractors," one elementary school principal said:

The Effective Schools program is the biggest program we have. It dovetails with [the intervention]. It's the umbrella for everything else... Site-based management also fits with [the intervention] because we already have parents involved.

However, it's not all roses. The county director worries about the addition of more new programs:

There are many new programs at once, perhaps too many. Some people feel they are being spread too thin.

There are also important, time-consuming, concurrent programs running in some of the other projects we studied. In one school, for example, much energy has been given to Project Read, a program designed to integrate real world information into reading instruction. The school's principal stated that all programs in the school are under the umbrella of the project, and that the project "gives the staff structure."

It is also clear from our look at these projects that the principal plays a key role, and that leadership and vision are critical. In one intervention, for example, the project director said that "some principals lack the skills to carry it off," and that principals can "resist,

block or support the project." One highly supportive school principal said:

The principal needs to keep discussing the goals with the staff to continually educate the staff about parent involvement. I couldn't say that they love it, but they know that this is what the school is about.

This principal went on to say:

The [intervention] is both a vision and a model of how you want your school to work. I knew what to do. I pulled together a team... Principals without a vision, or with a vision but without the skills to implement it, are going to have some trouble with the [intervention] process.

Sensitivity by the principal to the needs and aspirations of parents is critical. The principal sets the tone for parent involvement, and models appropriate behaviors through interaction with parents. In one school we visited, home visits by the principal set a norm, though not a formal requirement, for more informal communication with parents by teachers. As a consequence, teachers recognized that communicating with parents was important, and found comfortable ways to do this. In another school, the principal had ramps built in the hallways so that parents with infants in carriages could easily visit and participate in school activities.

In another site, the principal consciously spent a year supporting and nurturing -- and modeling -- the type of environment that would facilitate teachers' abilities to reach out to parents. Building on the premise that the

conditions for change can only occur when the teachers directly experience them (Sarason, 1982), this principal called and checked in on teachers in the evening, covered classes when emergencies arose, and helped teachers to feel professional by purchasing business cards for them. It was from this sense of commitment and backing that the teachers felt able to reach out to parents in new ways.

Both SRO sites had principals who lacked the necessary vision and energy to support the project's primary aims, and who were responding to other agendas. In one of the SRO schools, the principal was made to feel by the community superintendent that his appointment to tenure depended, to some degree, on the success of the project in his school. Moving the project into his school heightened the scrutiny under which the principal perceived himself.

The principal reported:

I'm feeling that it's falling all on me....I wasn't told what was expected of me. I've got to survive in this position. What I expected to happen is not what happened. I don't want to point fingers at anyone because they will be pointed back at me.

A district level administrator confirmed the principal's fears:

The role of [the outside intervenors] has heightened [the principal's] jeopardy. He's under closer scrutiny. He can make it. He just needs to define his vision, his direction. If IRE forces a crisis in which [the principal] feels he needs to take control of the school, the project will have been a success.

With this sort of pressure it is difficult to get a clear

leadership buy-in. It is no wonder that the staff perceives that the principal was less concerned with the true aims of the project than he was with appearances. One teacher said, "It's all image, no substance."

An important variable that may affect a principal's ability to function successfully in this type of third-party intervention is his/her professional training. Many of the successful principals we visited had previously been special education teachers. We posit that the commitment to parent involvement in the education of youngsters with special needs has, in some manner, predisposed these school leaders to support increased parent involvement for all children.

Other Important Variables. Through our research of the SRO project and the four comparison sites, we discovered a number of other variables that are likely to affect the success of third-party interventions. The two SRO sites were in different cities and had very little communication with one another. In each of the two cities, the SRO school was "an N of 1" and therefore had no other source of energy nearby. Two of the other interventions located many sites in the same geographic area, thereby enabling participants to learn and receive energy from one another. One of the interventions, in particular, has monthly intra-district meetings of all building project

coordinators. These meetings serve as a support group and sounding board for issues that arise for participants in the different school buildings. The climate of this intervention is generally more upbeat than the climate of the SRO project, in which many of the participants appear to view the glass as half empty.

The proximity of the third-party intervenor appears to be related to the development of a working relationship between the school site(s) and the intervenor. In the SRO project, the intervention was initially conceived and driven by one lead person. During the course of the project, IRE staff members and external consultants worked closely with the two school sites while the initial intervenor became more removed from the details and day-to-day workings of the project. In one of the comparison projects, the intervenor, although located about 500 miles away, initially made frequent visits to the sites. The number of visits has been reduced dramatically during the last few years, and the project director perceives that participants miss the intervenor's presence, although his staff members continue to visit regularly. In another of the interventions, the intervenor and one of the school principals disagree about the frequency of his visits: he perceives that he visits often while she perceives that he doesn't visit often enough. This has led the principal to comment that she is

really the driving force behind the project's success and that the intervenor is not in touch with the realities of the school.

Interestingly, then, it appears that the intervenor becomes the symbolic representation of the intervention in many projects, particularly those in which the project is driven more by the intervenor's ideas and less by a clearly defined paradigm. Even though an intervenor's staff members may be acknowledged by school-based people as being more directly helpful in accomplishing tasks, obtaining resources and offering assistance, frequent visits by the intervenor serve as visible reminders that the project exists, and that it is important.

Next, we learned that a series of critical decisions about allocation of resources and expenditure of time and energy (which also can be thought of as resources) are made by the intervenor as the project is being conceived. For example, the intervenor in one of the comparison sites decided that participants in the project must receive training in the project's model. A staff of people was assembled by the intervenor for the express purpose of training new participants. By contrast, the SRO project required little training of participants. Well into the first year of the project, the principal of the Boston school indicated that she and the school's staff needed to

learn how to involve parents. For a day and a half in March, the IRE staff met with the principal and 20 teachers in what by all accounts was a highly successful session focusing primarily on three topics: (1) getting to know the other people who teach in the school, (2) role playing how to communicate effectively with parents, and (3) discussing personal experiences as a parent. In May, a second session was organized for the 20 or so teachers who did not attend in March. Attendance at one of these sessions was made mandatory by the principal.

Although it is difficult to describe these sessions as "training," the SRO project nonetheless provided a forum for teachers to begin forming the cohesiveness that may be necessary to support the project's goals.

We also learned that definitions and measures of parent involvement vary widely among sites. The SRO project aims at broadening parent involvement, attempting to include more parents as partners in the education of their children. However, in the New York site, parent involvement was not broadened, it was deepened. Prior to the intervention, a small group (7 to 10 people) of Hispanic-American parents ran the parent organization. They participated in a number of important school decisions and processes, including the hiring of the current principal. During the two years of the SRO

project, this group became even more powerful. They were given their own room, and several of them were included on the School Planning Team mandated by the intervenor during the second year of the project. The remainder of the parents did not become appreciably more involved. In fact, a schism developed between this group of parents and a group of parents of pre-kindergarten children, who met in a different room in the school. In speaking to the members of the parent organization, it is clear that they feel that the SRO project has increased their involvement while acknowledging that the project has done little to involve other parents. Still, these parents feel more empowered than before the intervention, and consider the project to have been successful in increasing parent involvement. Others, particularly teachers in the school, have serious questions about whether the project has been successful, noting that African-American, Asian-American and most Hispanic-American parents have not been pulled into the process.

Of course, increased parent involvement is difficult to assess because it can, in part, be manifested by what goes on in the home, not just in the school. In one comparison site, the principal and one key parent spoke proudly of the increased awareness many parents had about their potential roles in the education of their children. This project sponsored working committees and evening workshops

for parents, and a key parent (along with one or two other highly committed parents) knocked on doors in order to encourage parents to become involved. Even though many of these parents may have attended none or only one of the committee or evening meetings, the fact that the school reached out to them may have brought about attitudinal or behavioral changes in the home. It should be mentioned here that the SRO project began experiencing some success with its home visitors program during the second year of the project, particularly in the Boston school.

Finally, even if introduction of the intervention is widely supported and responds to a real need, successful implementation of the project's model, even if the model has been adapted to better "fit" the site, remains problematic. Most interventions break down during the implementation phase because making change happen is hard work (Fullan, 1980; Mann, 1976b, Pressman and Wildavsky, 1973). Speculating about change is fun. Planning change is fun. Changing, however, is difficult. Third-party intervenors often operate on the mistaken assumption that if the project's ideas are accepted smoothly by the on-site people and respond to a felt need, and if on-site people have been involved in developing plans for the intervention, the desired changes will occur automatically. Many a ship has been sunk by this torpedo.

Conclusions

After studying the impact of the SRO project and visiting four other projects with similar goals but different intervention strategies, we have reached the following conclusions:

1. The likelihood of successfully involving parents in the education of their children is enhanced when the third-party intervention includes three components: a body of literature and/or experience that substantiates the project's ideas (i.e., an orthodoxy); a model for action (i.e., what to do); and explicit directions for activating the model (i.e., how to do the what).

This conclusion does not imply that local ownership of a project is detrimental or that mutual adaptation ought to be avoided. We simply are stating that school-based people need something to adapt, something to own. If projects, once implemented, are to closely resemble the intervenors' ideas, they must come to the site with more than a clear orthodoxy.

2. The selection of the site is critical. Third-party intervenors would be well advised to pay particular attention to this phase of the intervention, and to examine a number of essential variables including (a) the

culture of the site -- will it accept parents as partners? (b) activities already underway at the site -- will they interfere with the intervention? (c) the vision and commitment of the principal -- will he/she nurture and problem-solve as the intervention evolves? (d) the amount and type of training required for participants -- does participation in the project require infrequent or ongoing training, and does accepting parents as partners require for most people at this site a psychological paradigm shift? (e) the community resources available -- will they be plentiful and supportive enough to buttress the project's aims?

3. The match between an intervention's aims and the felt needs of most of the participants is quite important, particularly an intervention attempting to create a new order. This may require some sort of organizational diagnosis prior to intervening, assessing whether the organization's collective belief system recognizes the need for increased parent involvement, and supports working on the need. This also may require some sort of organizational re-education, informing the organization's collective belief system of the need to increase parent involvement, and encouraging commitment to working on it.

4. Do not isolate sites. Whenever possible, place two or more sites in the same school system. Doing this provides

additional energy sources for sluggish sites, and creates experienced mechanics within a system to tinker when malfunctions occur.

5. Within a clearly laid out intervention (as defined in the first conclusion), empower teachers and parents as much as possible. Providing teachers and parents with opportunities and resources for making their own choices about partnerships will likely enhance their commitment to the intervention.

6. Change is a slow and incremental process. Restructuring schools so that parents and community resources become partners in the education of children is a radical and threatening proposal, not just for school-based people but for parents and community agency workers. One or two years simply is not enough time to assess the efficacy of such radical interventions. Longitudinal evaluation and intervention is required.

7. Understand who the real targets of the intervention are. The SRO project, at its core, attempts to increase the likelihood of social and academic success for students. However, on its surface, the project aims its resources not at students, but at teachers and parents. In other words, in order to reach the students, the SRO project posits that teachers and parents must be reached

first. Therefore, the project's success ought not to be pinned on student achievement test scores or other student measures, at least not until there is some indication that the teachers and parents are being reached.

8. Define the project's terms and criteria for success clearly. For example, does increased parent involvement mean broadening the number of parents included in school activities or deepening the involvement of those already predisposed to participating?

9. Never underestimate the symbolic. The frequency of visits to the site by the intervenor is important, particularly in interventions that require school-based people to discard long-standing beliefs and behaviors. The easiest way for people to resist change is to ignore its pressures. The visibility of an intervenor (or site-specific designee) keeps the pressure on.

10. Written guidelines are important. Intervenors need to make clear to prospective school partners that involving parents is a key component of the intervention. School partners need to clearly understand this requirement and be encouraged to develop written policies and/or guidelines specifically detailing how parents are to become involved in the schools.

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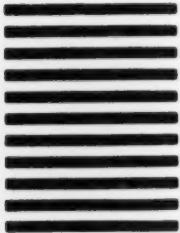


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